



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Shelley B. Mayer

Senator Shelley Mayer Joins Effort to Modernize New York's Election Laws

SENATOR SHELLEY MAYER May 3, 2018

| ISSUE: **ELECTION LAWS**



WESTCHESTER, NY--On Tuesday, State Senator Shelley Mayer (D-37) and her colleagues in the Senate Democratic Conference released the results of a survey that outlined several probable causes for New York's low voter turnout rate. To address these obstacles and help more New Yorkers exercise their Constitutional right to vote, Senator Mayer and the Senate Democratic Conference announced a legislative package that would update antiquated regulations and ease access to voting.

Senator Mayer highlighted a report, *Why Don't More New Yorkers Vote? A Snapshot Identifying Low Voter Turnout*, which detailed the results of a survey conducted with New Yorkers who did not participate in the 2016 General Election despite being eligible to vote. **The survey drew attention to the potential causes for New York State ranking 41st in the nation on voter participation in the 2016 General Election.** To view the full report and survey, [please click here](#).

"I am proud to stand with my new Senate Democratic colleagues in urging reform of New York's outdated election laws," **said State Senator Shelley Mayer**. "We must pass laws that allow for early voting, no-excuse absentee voting, and automatic registration to dramatically increase civic engagement and participation. This report makes clear that New Yorkers will participate in greater numbers if basic election laws are modernized."

Key findings from the survey include:

- 79% of respondents said they would be more likely to vote in an election if early voting was enacted.
- 76% of respondents said they would be more likely to vote in an election if no-excuse absentee voting was enacted.
- 81% of respondents who live in counties with voting hours from 12:00 - 9:00 PM on primary day said they would be more likely to vote in an election if voting hours were extended to 6:00 AM - 9:00 PM.
- 28% of respondents said they have missed an election because of work or school obligations.

To clear away the many barriers voters face in getting to the polls, Senator Mayer along with her Senate Democratic colleagues are pushing a series of bills that will enable early voting and no-excuse absentee voting, modernize and expand voter registration, extend Primary

Election voting hours and ensure uniformity throughout the state, and expand language options for ballots.

The Senator Democratic Conference's Voting Reforms package includes:

- **Early Voting:** This bill, S.7400-A, would establish an Early Voting system to permit eligible voters in New York State to vote in person during a designated period prior to any primary, special, or general election day. This bill will also establish an Early Voting Fund to cover the expenses of early voting so that local governments are not unfairly burdened.
- **No-Excuse Absentee Voting:** This bill, S.840, would amend the state Constitution to allow for any voter to request to vote by mail without declaring reason.
- **Automatic Voter Registration:** This bill, S.3409, would automatically register voters who interact with most state or local agencies unless they affirmatively opt not to do so.
- **The Voter Empowerment Act:** This bill, S.3304, would create a modern voter registration system that will reduce costs for processing voter registrations and maintain complete and accurate voter registration lists. This legislation will help reduce the inaccuracy and disenfranchisement caused by human error while also helping to prevent fraud. The Voter Empowerment Act will also, among other things, transfer the registrations of New Yorkers who move within the state; provide for access to voter registration records and the registration of eligible citizens over the Internet; and move the deadlines for voter registration.
- **Pre-Registration for 16- and 17-Year Olds:** This bill, S.4440, will enable 16- and 17-year olds to pre-register to vote.
- **Change of Party Enrollment Reform:** This bill, S.5615, would allow a voter who has changed their enrollment from one party to another to vote in a primary election unless the change is submitted during the ninety days prior to a primary election.

- **Primary Voting Hours Consistency:** This bill, S.7264, would ensure that primary voting hours across the State will be uniform and polling places will be open from 6:00 AM to 9:00 PM on Primary Election days.
- **Consolidation of Federal and State Primaries:** This bill, S.3562-A, would save tax payer dollars and make state primary elections the same day as federal primary elections. It also ensures that New York State's election law complies with the federal Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment (MOVE) Act.
- **Expanded Language Options for Ballots:** Senate Democratic Conference members have introduced legislation to ensure voters whose first language is not English understand their ballots and the voting process. These bills, S.5602, S.3869, and S.5825, would increase available materials in Haitian Creole, Bengali, Punjabi, Hindi, and Russian in areas with large numbers of voters who speak those languages.
- **Advanced Notice of Elections:** To ensure voters are well-informed and aware of upcoming elections, Senate Bills S.5527 and S.6733 would require Boards of Election to mail notices to voters shortly before all Primary, General, and Special Elections.